

VZCZCXRO6731
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMA RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHYD #0941 2760739
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 020739Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9290
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE 0216

UNCLAS YAOUNDE 000941

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

STATE ALSO FOR AF/C AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: AMID RISING CONCERN, YAOUNDE GOV'T TO RAZE 13 MORE
NEIGHBORHOODS

11. (SBU) Summary: Embassy contacts have expressed concern that the Yaounde City Council's (CUY) plan to demolish thirteen more neighborhoods as part of an urban renewal plan will render homeless thousands of residents, threatening to foster criminality and unrest. The demolitions initially garnered broad support from a public that had grown frustrated with Yaounde's anarchic sprawl, and the CUY insists its actions are entirely legal and proper. We welcome the initiative to enforce city regulations, but worry about unintended consequences on Yaounde's social fabric. End summary.

12. (U) The CUY has announced it will bulldoze 13 more neighborhoods as part of a controversial program to "beautify" Cameroon's capital city. Government Delegate Tsimi Evouna has undertaken an ambitious program to tackle Yaounde's uncontrolled sprawl, constructing parks, rebuilding roads, and demolishing illegal and unlicensed buildings. Press reports indicate that the CUY has demolished 15 neighborhoods in Yaounde since 2005. Fritz Ntone Ntone, the Government Delegate for Douala, has recently undertaken a similar campaign of demolitions in the name of urban renewal (septel).

13. (U) In Yaounde, Tsimi Evouna's aggressive demolitions were initially met with approval by a population frustrated with the anarchic sprawl of Yaounde's development. The demolitions are not haphazard; the occupants of the houses to be destroyed are alerted well in advance. The demolitions fall under five broad categories: structures built on public land, structures built on land deemed uninhabitable (e.g., on a flood plain), structures built without legal permits, structures appropriated by the state for public works, and structures built without permits. Tsimi Evouna has earned a reputation for being unsympathetic to displaced households; his tendency to notify neighborhoods with a strict 24-hour warning has earned him the nickname "Jack Bauer" among Yaounde residents, in allusion to the star character on the popular TV show "24," which features a 24-hour ticking clock.

14. (U) Many observers express trepidation about the plan to demolish 13 more neighborhoods, pointing out that thousands of residents will be rendered homeless, just six months after Yaounde and 30 other cities erupted in social unrest over rising socio-economic frustrations. As Government Delegate, Tsimi Evouna was appointed by President Paul Biya and rules essentially unchecked over the entire city of Yaounde and the seven publicly-elected mayors who head the city's sub-districts. Some critics have alleged an ethnic dimension to the demolitions; Tsimi Evouna is a native of the region and blamed violence in Yaounde in February on people who had migrated to Yaounde; the communities living the demolished neighborhoods are largely composed of ethnic groups who have migrated to Yaounde.

15. (SBU) In a September 18 meeting with the Ambassador, Tsimi Evouna was confident in his mandate from Biya (without saying whether Biya had explicitly ordered or approved the demolitions) and determined to continue ahead despite rising criticism. As for those rendered homeless by the demolitions, Tsimi Evouna said they are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs, not his concern. Tsimi Evouna insisted that the City Council always compensates property owners who had legally built their structures, but noted

that most landowners undervalue their assets on official paperwork (in order to avoid taxes), thereby undercutting their claims for compensation.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: In many ways, Tsimi Evouna's aggressive enforcement of city regulations is a welcome contrast to the lethargy and negligence that typifies many officials, but his blinkered blitz comes at a cost, most clearly to the thousands of Cameroonians displaced by the demolitions. We do not yet know whether the demolition of the illegal settlements will reduce insecurity (as Tsimi Evouna asserts) or create a class of citizens with no choice but to turn to criminality (as his critics fear), and the uncertainty underlines the inextricable link between internal stability and the lifting of living standards through stronger economic growth.

FOX.